

Gilroy's 'public' art form

GILROY—Ever feel like you wanted to paint the town red?

There's a group in Gilroy that's doing just that—only they're using far more colors.

Perhaps you've noticed the murals painted on the school district administration building on Third Street, at Eliot elementary school and at the Gilroy Apartments. They are painted by a group of student muralists funded by a CETA grant and managed by The Owl (South County Alternatives). The group is directed by the Tortuga Patrol, a muralist group from the Watsonville area.

The student muralists are Mt. Madonna high school students who are being paid as they learn. The coordinators of the group believe the students will be enticed to stay in school and finish through graduation while learning a skill through the mural program.

The murals, the young painters believe, are "public" art intended for the enjoyment of the entire community.

The artwork does not come under the Gilroy sign ordinance because there is no commercial intention in the murals, according to Michael Dorn, acting planning director.

Currently the group is seeking more walls to paint in Gilroy, says Jaime Rosso, of The Owl. The walls may be on commercial establishments or private residences. All interested may contact Rosso at The Owl.

Meanwhile, The Valley surveyed a number of Gilroy residents and city officials. Here are some of their comments:

• Fred Wood, city manager: "Some of them (the murals) I've been quite impressed with. Others, I don't understand at all."

• Bill Ayer, Parks and Recreation director: "I'm reserving judgement on the murals. Some look nice and the work is well done. I am thinking of having some of the new handball courts painted (by the muralists) which I'll present to the Parks and Recreation commission."

• Michael Dorn, acting planning director: "I've only seen the one on Third Street. I feel that any type of artwork is beneficial to the community."

• David Hansen, Public works director: "I'm impressed with the quality of the art work but I don't



A DETAIL FROM MURAL on school district building on Third Street.

the subject matter. (Hansen is referring to the mural on the school district building on Third Street). I don't feel it's appropriate for a school building and it's so ethnic it leaves out everything else in the community. I don't believe it shows enough of our heritage across the board. I would hate to have my neighbor paint his house like that. Perhaps it has a place but I wouldn't know where. Someone told me a can of brown paint could fix it."

• Norm Goodrich, mayor: "Personally I think the murals look as good as a blank wall. It (the mural on Third Street) reminds of Mexico where there are many mosaics all over the buildings. I have no objections to them at all."

• Jim Roberts, Chamber of Commerce director: "I like the idea. Bare walls are ugly. An art critic, I'm not but I assume if the murals are painted by professionals they serve

as art. I haven't made up my mind yet whether or not I like them. Sometimes you don't have a reaction right away to art work."

• Robert Infelise, superintendent of Gilroy schools: "I like them. The design for the school district mural was approved by the school board. And of course the muralists are Mt. Madonna high school students and the experience has been positive for them."